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SUBJECT: KARZAI HOPES TO BOLSTER GILANI IN FACE OF AFGHAN  
MEDIA AND OPPOSITION IRE

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Deputy National Security Advisor Engineer Ibrahim Spinzada told us August 5 Karzai hopes his SAARC Summit rapprochement with Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani would bolster Pakistan's new civilian leadership in its contest with the military and the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI). Karzai has received widespread and strong criticism from both the media and parliamentary opposition over his decision to meet Gilani and agreeing to renew suspended bilateral talks. Spinzada dismissed the criticism as political posturing.

¶2. (SBU) Junbesh MP Mohammad Shakar Kargar dismissed the Karzai-Gilani meeting as meaningless. Both leaders, he said, are exceptionally weak; Gilani cannot even exercise discipline over his own coalition. Kargar complained that restarting bilateral meetings "may please the United States," but they will do nothing to eliminate the threat Pakistan poses to Afghanistan. Several Afghan newspapers railed against Karzai for defying the will of the Afghan Council of Ministers and the Afghan people. The Council of Ministers on July 14 had suspended three bilateral meetings: the Canadian-mediated G8 Joint Border Cooperation Meeting, which had been scheduled for July 23-24 in Dubai, the Joint Economic Cooperation Commission scheduled for July 26-27 in Kabul, and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference (RECC) scheduled for August 26-27 in Islamabad.

¶3. (C) Spinzada reaffirmed Karzai's intention to reschedule the meetings announced in Colombo. That intention may take time to trickle down to the GIROA's senior working level. Afghan Deputy Minister of Commerce for Foreign Trade Azim Wardak registered his personal willingness to proceed with the RECC, but doubted the August dates could be salvaged.  
WOOD